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Astrovision Aiming At Bigger Piece Of Game Pie

Astrovision. One of Superman's super powers? No. But, according to VP Ray George, the two-year-old company is rapidly emerging as a super power in the video game industry. George says Astrovision plans to introduce at least 16 new and ex-



Videocode cartridges:
Adventures in outer space.

citing cartridges, add-ons for the Astro Professional Arcade computer and an aggressive multi-million-dollar ad campaign aimed at a different target market in 1982.

George is forecasting a whopping 1,000 per cent growth for Astrovision's video game division in 1982. This, he says, will match 1981's growth—which saw the firm's sales climb from \$1 million to over \$10 million.

"We've already booked over \$70 million in sales for 1982," says George. "We expect to ship over \$100 million this year and it's only our second year."

The Road From Bally

George is co-founder of Astrovision which two years ago bought the consumer division of Bally and began marketing the home video game/computer under the Astro Professional Arcade label. George forecasts that by 1985 the company's sales will top the \$1 billion mark.

At least part of that revenue will come from new Arcade cartridges. Introduced at CES, the cartridges add new "adventure" elements to the games and create what George calls a "revolutionary new dimension in home entertainment."

The new cartridges include Munchie, The Wizard, Solar Conqueror, Cosmic Raiders, Space Fortress and Quest for the Orb.

"These new games are a major step beyond the present generation of video games," says George. "We've got the same advanced chips in our Astro Arcade that are used in Midway coin-op machines so we can create complex video and sound effects."

The eight new cartridges are now being shipped and, according to George, at least eight additional cartridges will be ready by the end of 1982 along with a "supercartridge" which he says will enhance the computer's capabilities and feature "a lot more memory."

Not Just A Toy

Like many other video game manufacturers, Astrovision doesn't consider its product just a toy. In addition to three built-in games with four-player capability, the Astro Arcade incorporates a calculator and comes with a BASIC cartridge at a suggested retail of \$299.

"We're not in the low-end business,"



Astrovision's George:
"We're not in the low-end business."

he says. "We're high-end. Our BASIC cartridge turns the Arcade into a personal computer and actually teaches the user how to program."

George says this gives Astrovision a jump on what appears to be an industry trend. Those consumers who became interested in computers through basic video game systems will begin to step themselves up and create a substantial trade-up market in their search for something more sophisticated.

"The consumer will continue to upgrade," says George. "He'll want better games and better product. We have product scheduled through 1990. The personal computer is coming in and the Astro Arcade is a personal computer."

As a personal computer, the Arcade allows the user to write his own games, make charts and plot graphs. This versatility, says George, gives the Arcade expanded market appeal.

"Our target market is anywhere from four to 100," he explains. "If a person can pick up a joystick, he can enjoy our product. The computer has an interface which allows the use of a tape recorder and the programs can be stored. People write their own games then sell and trade them to one another."

Astrovision's new multi-million-dollar advertising campaign takes into account what George feels is a broad target market. The campaign includes both television and print ads and offers a co-op program for dealers. The budget for 1982 represents an increase of more than 50 per cent over the 1981 figure.

"We'll be spending \$8 to \$10 million this year," says George, "as opposed to our \$3 million budget for 1981. Our commercials are short and to the point and they emphasize how much can be done with this unit."

Something You Have To Do

To meet the demand for the over \$70 million in orders already committed for 1982, Astrovision plans to triple its domestic production capability for the year. It has added a second production facility in Sacramento CA and plans call for an additional plant in Pennsylvania.

"We're shipping to Canada and overseas to Venezuela now," reports George, "and we plan to reach Europe and the Far East by the end of the year."

At present, Astrovision employs 15 to 20 full-time programmers but, as the company expands, George says these numbers could increase as well.

"We could employ as many as 30 to 40," he says. "It's important to constantly have new game cartridges. It's something you have to do."

Family Interface

George believes computers have contributed to increased interaction among families by taking TV out of the passive mode and making it participatory.

"People are staying home more now," he says. "Moms and Dads are beginning to interface with their kids again. And our Astro Professional Arcade has something for everybody."

MARCH '82